

News Release



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After Major Rehabilitation, Railroad Museum Returns Heavy Duty 80-Foot Turntable to Service

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Owned and operated by the California State Railroad Museum, the hard-working and heavy duty 80-foot turntable located at the west end of the Museum officially returns to full operation on Friday, April 12, after a major maintenance overhaul. Fabricated by the American Bridge Company in 1911 -- the same company that built the “workhorse” I Street Bridge during the very same year -- and originally installed in Yakima, Washington, the turntable was acquired by California State Parks from Union Pacific Railroad and installed in Old Sacramento circa 1980. The turntable is used to move heavy locomotives and equipment in and out of the Railroad Museum; all locomotives and rail cars going in or out of the nearby Central Pacific Railroad Passenger Station and its display tracks also must cross the turntable because of the constrained track layout in Old Sacramento.

With minimal maintenance needed over the years, the hard-working turntable has not been overhauled since its original installation in Old Sacramento. Over the course of the last couple of years, signs of wear began to emerge. The primary challenge arose when the largest and heaviest diesel locomotives were moved onto the turntable, causing it to “deflect” or bend downward at the ends and literally get stuck. The only way to turn the table under these conditions was to attach cables and chains to a large rubber-tired machine such as a front-end loader, and literally drag the turntable around.

After a thorough analysis and testing to identify the best solution, the turntable was disassembled this past winter so the real rehabilitation work could begin. First the existing timber decking, railings, and bridge timbers (which support the rails) were removed. Then, specially built steel jacking frames were moved into place and large pneumatic jacks lowered into the pit. The table was raised about four feet and placed on temporary wood cribbing, and the main bearings then extracted so they could be taken to the shop and refurbished. The steel turntable “bridge structure” was thoroughly inspected from all sides, and itself found to be in very good condition (especially considering its 1911 fabrication date). To help ensure a long life for the refurbished turntable, rust and grime were removed and long lasting epoxy and urethane coatings were applied. In the end, the complete rehabilitation project included a new coat of paint, cleaning and resurfacing of the pivot bearing assembly, machining of new steel support rods, new ties and decking, and careful reinstallation of the railroad rails and safety railings above the deep pit.

The Railroad Museum’s paid staff and volunteers worked together under State Parks leadership to provide the necessary expertise and labor to complete the project’s many steps. Funding for this major rehabilitation project was made available by the California State Railroad Museum Foundation.

About the California State Railroad Museum

Operated by California State Parks with financial assistance from the non-profit California State Railroad Museum Foundation, the California State Railroad Museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day. Widely regarded as North America’s finest and most popular railroad museum, the complex of facilities includes the 100,000-square foot Railroad History Museum plus the reconstructed Central Pacific Railroad Passenger Station and Freight Depot, 1849 Eagle Theatre, and Big Four and Dingley Spice Mill commercial buildings in Old Sacramento. For 24-hour information, visit www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org or call (916) 445-6645.

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